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MADRID FOR H. LLORENS, BRASILIA FOR S. HENSHAW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/04/2018

TAGS: PGOV KDEM HO

SUBJECT: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER ORELLANA CLEANS HOUSE AT THE  
MINISTRY

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Ford, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Edmundo "Mundo" Orellana took office on February 1. On his first day in office, he received the Ambassador and told us of his plans to clean up the Ministry by removing some of the over 500 employees (all party activists) who had been added during former FM Milton Jimenez's tenure. True to his word, on February 29, 80 employees were fired from the Ministry, most of whose contracts had run out. He told PolCouns that he expected two more waves of dismissals, one at the end of March and the other at the end of April. In addition, Orellana publicly fired the Honduran Consuls based in New York (Javier Hernandez) and Washington (Marta Zuniga) for corruption or abuse of authority, and is publicly investigating the consuls in Houston (Lastenia Pineda), Atlanta (Rosa Juarez de Pineda), New Orleans (Enna Liliana Castro Rice), and Mexico City (Carlos Mendieta Linares). He also fired the vice consul in New York, Gilda Concepcion Argenal, who is a close friend of Liberal Party leader Patricia Rodas. Argenal has been receiving a salary of USD 4,400 per month for over a year, but still lives in Honduras and has never reported for work in New York.

¶2. (C) Comment: Orellana is firing all of Jimenez's loyal party followers who were unqualified for their jobs or who never even bothered to show up for work. Although Jimenez no longer controls a Ministry, he is still close to President Zelaya, and retains substantial influence as his legal advisor. We have heard that Jimenez is very upset about the firings (mostly because they make him look bad) and that he will deny any knowledge of specific cases if approached by the press. We have also heard that Orellana's days may be numbered, but he has been very smart to do this publicly, because the firings have been wildly popular and thus give him some measure of protection. In order to support these courageous moves, the Embassy will set up background briefings with local press to discuss our cancellation of visas of those who are fired by the MFA and our previous struggles with the abuse of diplomatic visas for those who were going to the United States but never appeared at work.  
End Comment.

FORD